

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

IN RESPONSE TO

A resolution of the Senate of the 12th instant, transmitting a communication of the port physician of Philadelphia relative to the danger from the introduction of cholera through immigration.

DECEMBER 14, 1892.—Referred to the Committee on Immigration and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
December 14, 1892.

SIR: I am in receipt of the resolution of the Senate of the 12th instant—

That the Secretary of the Treasury be directed to transmit to the Senate any communications recently received from the port physician of the city of Philadelphia concerning the danger of the introduction of cholera into this country during the coming season, and also to inform the Senate whether, during the past summer, any immigrants shipped back to Europe by the United States immigration officers were retaken from the vessels by their owners contrary to law, and, if so, to state the circumstances of such recaption, and whether or not prosecutions were instituted to punish the violations of law.

In reply thereto I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a communication made to the Philadelphia board of health concerning the suspension of immigration during the existence of cholera in Europe, by the port physician at Philadelphia, Pa., on December 5, 1892.

As to whether, during the past summer, any immigrants placed on board vessels by United States immigration officers, for return to the ports at which they embarked, were taken from such vessels by the owners contrary to law, I have to state that no such violation of law has been reported to this Department.

Respectfully, yours,

CHARLES FOSTER,
Secretary.

The PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE.

COMMUNICATION TO THE PHILADELPHIA BOARD OF HEALTH, CONCERNING SUSPENSION OF IMMIGRATION DURING THE EXISTENCE OF CHOLERA IN EUROPE, BY THE PORT PHYSICIAN AT THE PORT OF PHILADELPHIA, PA.

OFFICE OF THE PORT PHYSICIAN,
ROOM 610, CITY HALL,
Philadelphia, December 5, 1892.

GENTLEMEN: I hold it to be my duty to invite your attention to the menaces to the public health involved in the resumption by the International Navigation Company of transatlantic steerage traffic. Although the imminence of the danger of the implantation of cholera in America may now be regarded as apparently passed for this year, provided the President's proclamation suspending immigration continues rigidly in force, I can not but regard the removal of this powerful barrier as a renewed and apparently unnecessary exposure of the United States to a prolongation of the danger of introduction of the infection of cholera. It is true that official declarations now indicate that cholera is no longer widely epidemic in Germany, Holland, or Belgium, but it is certain that the disease still lingers in those countries, and I wish to warn you that such official declarations rarely, if ever, represent the real truth, either at the beginning or toward the close of epidemic of cholera.

The desire to clear vessels with clean bills of health is usually stronger in such cases than a conscientious regard of the plain truth. Cholera exists to-day in southwestern Russia, at some places along the shores of the Black Sea, and in the region of the Lower Danube. The disease continues to exist in the capital of Hungary, and in many portions of the Empire of Austria. It still lingers in the capital of France, and it certainly retains its footing in many of the provinces of the French Republic. It has existed and it still exists in Marseilles, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts made by the health officials of that city to suppress the truth, and in this connection let me point out to you that these same health authorities deliberately and successfully concealed the existence of a considerable epidemic of cholera in 1883. In short, while cholera may be admitted to have nearly vanished, at least in epidemic form, from northwestern Europe, it certainly appears to retain its foothold in the southeastern portion of that continent, from time to time attacking new districts.

From reliable information, in part from reports of the United States consuls in Europe to the Department of State in Washington, it appears certain that a great portion of the emigration from southern Russia and southeastern Europe, as well as from central and northern Russia, Poland, and Germany, to this country embarks at Hamburg, Antwerp, and Havre. Much of that which proceeds from southern Russia and Hungary passes through Switzerland and across France to take ship at Havre, whilst not a little goes by ship from Odessa to Marseilles, thence by railroad to Havre for transportation to America. Furthermore, no inconsiderable number of emigrants from the above-named countries, especially during the time of the embargo placed by this country on shipping from the infected ports, have gone to England in order to take ship to America at the British ports. Six thousand Russians came into this country from Havre alone in the month of July last, and during the last fiscal year 84,000 Russians and 33,000 Poles were imported into the United States.

It is not my province, nor is this the time or place, to discuss the

political, moral, or social questions suggested by the unrestricted and habitual admission into this country of the most objectionable class of immigrants. I feel it to be my duty, however, to again point out, as I have repeatedly done, the danger to the public health with which this class of people have threatened this country for several months past, and continue to menace it at the present time.

These people, whether they be called "immigrants," or the "wives and children" of alien residents, or be designated by the new term of "steerage tourists," starting six or eight months ahead of time for the purpose of visiting the Chicago Fair, after leaving or passing through localities which are, or have recently been, infected with cholera, are liable to carry in their persons or in their filthy clothing or personal effects often as far as their ultimate destination in this country and let loose there the active germs of the disease. The herding of these people (that is, the class of people who, in ordinary times, cross the Atlantic in the steerage) into the miserably ventilated and frightfully unsanitary quarters usually provided for the steerage passengers on transatlantic steamships, the modern rapidity of ocean travel, and the great facility with which these swarms of people are soon distributed all over our country, tend to multiply the danger to the public health which, under the imperfections of health laws, and the lax and unsatisfactory administration of them, is difficult to guard even at ordinary times against the dangers of importation of infectious diseases to which the incessant influx of these people constantly exposes the country. In their enormous numbers (500,000 to 750,000 a year), their poverty and squalor, and in their frequent transportation of all sorts of infections and contagions, these immigrants can be likened best to Oriental pilgrims, in whose track pestilence has so frequently followed. The closure of our ports against them during the period of great prevalence of cholera in northwestern Europe has, in my opinion, more than all other precautionary measures combined, enabled the country to escape thus far the introduction of cholera; but I wish to warn your board that with the subsidence of cholera in northwestern Europe, the public health of the United States is not safe against an outbreak of cholera in some part of our country, even at this season of the year, unless constant care be taken to guard against the probability that the germs of the disease may be transported in the clothing and personal effects of those classes of transatlantic travelers who usually come to this country in the steerage.

I deem it unnecessary to review the whole history of cholera for the purpose of proving the danger of neglecting to adopt such means as will make it impossible for infection to be carried in the apparel and personal effects of the steerage classes. They are well known to all sanitarians and well-informed health officers. I may mention, however, for the benefit of the public some significant incidents in the history of American cholera epidemics of 1849 and 1873, for they are well worth remembering at this time.

In 1849 emigrants from Sweden via New York and Buffalo arrived at Chicago in perfect health, and having experienced no sickness during the whole of their long journey. On their arrival they unpacked their chests of clothing, and two days later one died of cholera. Four attacks of the disease soon occurred in the family which housed these immigrants, and from this house an epidemic of cholera rapidly spread. This experience was repeated in the same city during the same year.

Again in 1873 epidemic outbreaks of cholera occurred in Ohio, Minnesota, and Dakota, which were caused by cholera poison packed up in

the household effects of emigrants from Holland, Sweden, and Russia, respectively.

These immigrants sailed from healthy ports in healthy vessels, and were subjected to the usual sanitary requirements of the period (that is, mere boarding by the quarantine officer and hurried inspection). They passed through New York and the intermediate territory without injury to the public health; but when their infected goods were unpacked in the interior of the continent, they liberated the poison which gave rise to the local outbreaks.

In the discussion of this question I can not too severely emphasize the well-known fact that cholera has never been brought to the Atlantic coast of North America except by vessels transporting this class of filthy people from Europe. I have repeatedly pointed out that it is practically only people of this class and condition who, during time of prevalence of cholera in any portion of Europe whence they are likely to proceed or through which they may migrate, expose this country to the danger of cholera.

To persistently and relentlessly, winter and summer, adhere to the policy of rigid exclusion from all our ports of these dangerous classes until cholera shall have entirely vanished from Europe, is to strike at the root of the difficulty, and, in my opinion, is the only way to certainly succeed in protecting the country during the whole time it is threatened with the infection of this disease.

To permit the "wives and children of aliens" (and mark that there is no maximum age named of these so-called children; even the grown sons and daughters are included within this term), would offer opportunity for abuses that could not be avoided, especially if these abuses were perpetrated with the connivance of the agents of the transportation companies. To allow these companies to resume steerage traffic in "such aliens as may desire to visit the United States without intending to remain or reside here," it seems clear to me, would practically nullify the real object aimed at by the President's proclamation of September 1, namely, to avoid the danger of the introduction of cholera through the person or personal effects of people surrounded by squalor, filth, and infection in their own homes, and pursued by similar or worse unsanitary conditions during the whole course of their journey by land and sea to America. What difference does it make to guardians of the public health whether this class of aliens (the agents of the International Navigation Company may call them "tourists" if they choose) come to visit only or to seek a permanent home? *It is in their coming at this time for any purpose whatever that the danger lies.*

That the supervising surgeon-general of the Marine Hospital Service is fully alive to the dangers to the public health to which this country is still exposed by the transportation from Europe of these classes, the following quotations from his official letters, addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury, show:

SIR: Referring to Department circular of September 1, approved by the President, regarding restrictions upon immigration, and to the exceptions which have been made from time to time in behalf of certain vessels, permitting them to land immigrants that have been brought since September 1, on the ground that such immigrants were booked and actually assembled before the date of the circular, I beg leave to state that it is now more than two months since the issue of the circular, and it appears to me that all immigrants who were booked and assembled at that date must by that time have reached America. In the interests, therefore, of the public health, and to render the said circular efficient in its action, I have respectfully to suggest that word be sent to the various steamship companies that exceptions to this class will not hereafter be made. (November 10, 1892.)

In another letter, dated November 7, referring to circular No. 24, of the International Navigation Company, instructing its agents of their determination to resume passenger traffic in the steerage of vessels from Europe, the supervising surgeon-general says:

The wives and children of alien residents coming to join the husbands and parents already domiciled in the United States, it appears to me, are immigrants within the definition of that term. In support of these suggestions I respectfully state that, although the cholera is subsiding in Europe, the danger of introduction through clothing and persons of immigrants who may have been in infected localities still remains, and will remain for several months to come; and that the difficulty of determining whether the alien in the steerage is coming for the purpose of residence or for the purpose of visiting only is so great as to make it impracticable, and it is believed that large numbers of immigrants proper would gain admission under this pretense. The difficulty of determining whether the claim that steerage passengers are residents of the United States is true seems insuperable, and as these residents are at best not citizens, their coming in the steerage might properly place them in the category of immigrants for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the circular. The danger lies in the fact that this traffic once begun would increase, and might, in a short time, render nugatory the circular itself.

While calling your attention to the dangers involved in the resumption of transportation of the steerage classes, I would quote also a passage from a letter of November 15 from the supervising surgeon-general of the Marine Hospital Service. It points out another avenue by which the cholera infection may find entrance into this country.

SIR: Information has been received to the effect that personal baggage, wearing apparel, used articles of clothing, etc., are being shipped in bond from European countries, and are sent to the United States bonded warehouses, there opened and inspected before being transhipped to destination. As this clothing comes in the shape of cargo, and escapes the ordinary disinfection which has been required by Department circulars relating to the disinfection of baggage of immigrants, and inasmuch as there is danger of the introduction of cholera into the United States by this means, I beg respectfully to urge that the bundles of clothing aforesaid be examined in the specially provided premises separate from the rest of the bonded warehouses, and there disinfected before being allowed to be transported to destination.

What consideration the honorable Secretary of the Treasury, or his representatives, may have given to these communications of his chief official sanitary adviser I do not know. I only know that through the frequent special rulings of the Treasury Department, especially their technical interpretation of the meaning of the word "immigrants," so far as the exercise of the power of the national Government for the protection of the public health against the danger of introduction of cholera infection is concerned, the usefulness of the President's proclamation suspending immigration has been greatly lessened. Perhaps the disposition repeatedly shown by the Treasury Department to dangerously relax the restrictions upon the westward movement of the immigrant classes has been due to the quiescence during the last month of nearly all boards of health, while the clamor of the Atlantic transportation companies for the removal or relaxation of these restrictions has been correspondingly loud and incessant.

I would therefore urgently recommend that your board urge upon the Treasury Department such an enforcement of the President's proclamation suspending immigration as will insure the public health against the dangers which are sure to arise from the subterfuges and evasions systematically practiced by the transatlantic steamship companies, or by the westward-bound steerage passengers themselves, or both, in order to defeat the only purpose which can justify the issuance of the President's proclamation, viz, the protection of the United States against the introduction of cholera infection through the persons or apparel and effects of the class of people who, in ordinary times, travel in the steerage.

It has been pretended that the resumption of steerage traffic may benefit some American citizens waiting to return home. Whether this may be a mere pretense or not I will not undertake to say, but I contend that the conditions of the steerage, for which the transportation companies are responsible, are unfit surroundings for American citizens at any time, much more so when they may be further endangered by close association with immigrants who may have in their persons or personal effects the infection of cholera.

So long as cholera exists in Europe, by all means permit these companies, if they will, to bring back in the second cabin to America those of our citizens who are too poor to pay more than steerage fare, and commend them for their public-spiritedness and humane course; but do not let these American citizens be packed in like cattle among filthy and disease-carrying immigrants.

While almost the entire country has been for months, and still is, engaged in warding off cholera by abating nuisances and bettering sanitary conditions at great cost, these Atlantic transportation companies incessantly clamor for the right to resume steerage transportation to America of swarms of people who, having lived in filth in their own foreign homes, and at all times a menace to the public health, are actually placed in worse conditions during the ocean voyage. I wish in this connection to emphasize the fact that there is no Atlantic transportation steamer with the steerage full that ever came into an American port, even after some effort to make a decent appearance, clean enough to escape indictment and punishment for maintaining a public nuisance if the same law were applied to them that is now almost daily enforced for the protection of Philadelphia against the slovenliness of some of her own citizens.

To my mind the worst phase of the danger to which this country is at present exposed through the possibility of introduction of the infection of cholera in the apparel and personal effects of immigrants lies in the fact that neither the immigrants themselves nor the Atlantic transportation companies can be trusted to assist either the United States or the local authorities in discriminations between those steerage passengers who are likely to transport the germs of cholera from those who are not. Anyone conversant with the details of the movements of cholera epidemics from place to place knows full well the subterfuges and evasions which are at least very frequently, if not indeed as a rule, practiced by passengers and transportation companies alike for the purpose of escaping quarantine restrictions. Numerous examples of such unfair dealing with health authorities, in the discharge of their functions to protect the public health, are to be found in my report on the last pandemic of cholera, embracing a period of five years and extending over most of the quarters of the globe. But it is not necessary to go even that far back to find striking examples which should convince health authorities in this country of the danger of trusting too implicitly in the assurances or declarations of those interested in the transportation of emigrants from Europe. You will doubtless remember how in several instances during the time that cholera was raging in Hamburg the ships' officers of the Hamburg-American Packet Company attempted to mislead the quarantine authorities of New York by such declarations as the following:

Capt. F. Schroder and Ship's Surgeon D. Wendland, of the steamship *Bohemia*, which arrived at New York on September 15, in answer to the inquiries of the health officer concerning the sanitary condition of the ship's passengers during the voyage, had the effrontery to declare

that the only sickness experienced was "gastro-intestinal trouble," notwithstanding the fact that there had been 11 deaths at sea caused by cholera.

On the arrival of the *Rugia* on September 5, in the same port, the captain reported "sickness," but did not call it cholera.

The ship's officers of the *Normannia*, which arrived September 5, after having deaths at sea, asserted that those deaths were caused by diarrhea.

Furthermore, when we search for examples of the unreliability of assurances of transportation companies concerning the domicile or nativity of transatlantic passengers for the purpose of enforcement of sanitary precautions, deemed to be necessary for the public safety, we find them at hand here in Philadelphia; and I wish to publicly recall your attention to the policy of the International Navigation Company in this connection as to some of the acts of that company which have, in my opinion, endangered the public health, and indicate most clearly the futility of the hope that this great American transportation company can be implicitly relied upon to aid the efforts of your board in guarding against the introduction of cholera.

The first of these acts to which I would call your attention, and by this means give wide publicity to, is the case of the steamship *Ohio*, which arrived at this port on the 16th of September last with 401 steerage passengers. You will remember that while this ship was lying in quarantine at the Lazaretto, Mr. George H. Higbee, manager of this company, in order to induce you to permit his company to remove the passengers from the *Ohio* without detention, and disinfection of their baggage and personal effects, publicly assured the board of health, in open session, that there were no immigrants on board other than British subjects and Scandinavians, positively declaring that there were none from the continent of Europe.

I wish to inform you that a communication from the office of the United States Commissioner of Immigration, dated September 21, flatly contradicts this assertion of the manager of the International Navigation Company. According to this communication, while there were only 52 Scandinavians on board the *Ohio* at that time, there were no less than 121 immigrants who had proceeded from the continent of Europe, including emigrants from Russia, Poland, Galicia, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Prussia, France, and Italy; 51 of these being Russians, 19 Poles, and 11 Galicians, cholera at that time being widely epidemic among the homes of these people.

In this connection I wish to add that in the case of the arrival since that time at the port of Philadelphia of steamships of that transportation company carrying passengers, it has rarely occurred that the statements of the ship's officers to the boarding officer at the lazaretto concerning the character and origin of passengers have coincided with the results of the examinations made by the United States Commissioner of Immigration. While it has been almost an invariable custom of the ship's officers to assure the boarding officer that there were no immigrants on board, it has almost as invariably transpired that the United States Commissioner of Immigration has discovered their presence. I would specify the three last arrivals at this port of passenger ships of this company as examples of the truth of this statement.

A letter from the United States Commissioner of Immigration, dated December 2, gives a summary of the arrival at this port of passengers brought by the steamship *Switzerland* on November 19, the *British*

Princess on November 24, and the *Lord Gough* on November 30. According to this summary there have recently arrived by these three steamers 751 passengers, classified as follows:

Second cabin	128
Steerage.....	623
	<hr/> 751

Of these, 50 were United States citizens; 27 were aliens who had been in this country before, while 674 were aliens who had never been in the United States.

Among these 674 aliens who never had been in the United States before their arrival at the port of Philadelphia, during the past month, and who must be regarded as to all intents and purposes "immigrants," notwithstanding the quibblings over the technical construction of the term, there were many people from the continent of Europe, natives of countries which have recently been visited by epidemics of cholera, to wit, from Germany, Russia, Poland, Belgium, Holland, Hungary, France, and Austria.

These facts prove very conclusively to my mind that the International Navigation Company, in the transportation of European passengers, is at the present time, and has for some time past, been deliberately evading the spirit, if not the letter, of the President's proclamation intended to suspend immigration as a very important precautionary measure against cholera.

I by no means wish to say that either the manager of the International Navigation Company, or the officers upon their steamers, have willfully falsified in making these declarations; doubtless they have been deceived. I merely point out these facts, which the records of the health officer and of the United States Commissioner of Immigration establish as unquestionable, in order to show that the only safe course to pursue is to act on the presumption that any person of the steerage class arriving in the ships of this company should be suspected as possibly carrying the germs of cholera in their personal effects, whatever their own declaration, that of the officers of the International Navigation Company, or of the ship's officers may be as to the domicile or the location for the past six months of these people. In view of them I urge upon your board the necessity of rigidly, and without exception, requiring that, previous to their landing at the port of Philadelphia, their wearing apparel and personal effects be thoroughly disinfected.

The statute law of Pennsylvania declares that—

No person or persons, goods, wares, merchandise, bedding, or clothing from any port or place at which any malignant or contagious disease [the measles excepted] prevailed at the time of their departure, or from on board any vessel on which any such disease existed while they were on board, shall enter or be brought into the city or county of Philadelphia at any time between the first day of June and the first day of October in any year, by land or water, without the permission of the board of health first had and obtained, under the penalty of any sum not exceeding \$500 for each and every such offense, and the forfeiture of all such goods, wares, merchandise, bedding, or clothing, to be recovered and appropriated as directed by the twenty-ninth section of this act. (Act approved January 29, 1818.)

Another statute enacted with special reference to protection against cholera, for it was passed during the time of the existence of a cholera epidemic in this country, declares that—

For the purpose of more effectually securing the city and port of Philadelphia from the introduction of pestilential and contagious diseases, every ship or vessel arriving from a foreign port shall, in addition to the visitation and examination now pre-

scribed, be visited by the lazaretto physician before passing the lazaretto, or the port physician before being hauled to any wharf within the city or port of Philadelphia, and such lazaretto physician or port physician, as the case may be, *shall rigidly examine the baggage, effects, and property of the passengers and crew.* (Act approved March 25, 1850.)

In the discussion of this important sanitary measure of the temporary suspension of immigration during the continuance of cholera in Europe, I believe that too much consideration has been given to the representations of the transatlantic steamship companies interested in the immigration traffic. In this connection I would reiterate what I have frequently stated on proper occasions during the last eight years, that the impediments and burdens upon commerce which are necessary to be imposed for the protection of the public health have been caused solely by the persistence in the immigration traffic of the shipping companies. The business and trade of the ports of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore have been made to suffer solely because of the greed of these companies for the profits by this traffic in human freight in quarters but little better than those provided for the transportation of cattle, selfishly ignoring the fundamental right of the people to insist that no person or corporation shall pursue a calling in such a manner as to jeopardize the general welfare, as well as heedlessly subjecting to serious losses the interests of trade represented in the cargo, not only carried by these ships, but also indirectly that transported in all other ships during the same period. If all immigration were rigidly suspended during the times that it is necessary to guard against the introduction of cholera it goes without saying that maritime trade would be inflicted with only the slightest hindrances. The incessant hue and cry of "paralysis of trade," raised by the transatlantic companies engaged in the immigration traffic is nothing more or less than "a great humbug and bugaboo" intended to frighten the business interests of the country. Instead of being misled by such a false cry these same general business interests should combine to relieve themselves from the burdens which are brought upon them by the continuance of the immigration traffic during the period when it is necessary to adopt precautions against the introduction of cholera, not by opposing sanitary precautions which are absolutely necessary for the public safety, but rather by striking at the root of the evil and joining hands with the health authorities in stopping temporarily the steerage and immigration traffic. Let those who are interested in the usually harmless cargoes of the transatlantic steamers unite in advocating a radical remedy for their relief, namely, that the ships transporting them shall not, at the same time, carry European emigrants, or people of that class, during the existence of cholera in Europe.

I have deemed it to be my duty to thus publicly call your attention to the foregoing recital of facts, suggestions, and provisions of statutory law for a double purpose:

First. I would urgently urge upon the Philadelphia board of health, as the authorized guardians of the public health of this city and of the State of Pennsylvania, as well as of the people of the whole country, in so far as it may be assailed by way of the port of Philadelphia, to join your influence formally with that of the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service upon the Secretary of the Treasury in favor of the rigid enforcement of the President's proclamation suspending immigration during the continuance of cholera in Europe; in favor also of the enlarged interpretation of the term "immigrant" as suggested in the letters of the surgeon-general above quoted; and also in opposition to the influences which are incessantly

brought to bear upon that officer by the foreign Atlantic transportation companies, and in particular by our own International Navigation Company.

Second. I would furthermore earnestly urge upon the Philadelphia board of health, as a local body constituted and clothed with ample powers by local laws (which were originally independent of national control or supervision in the absence of national legislation, and which, even now, are not superseded or suspended by any act of Congress or proclamation of the President in pursuance thereof) the wisdom and necessity of the full exercise of its several powers and functions in preventing the possibility of the introduction of the infection of cholera in the wearing apparel and personal effects of voyagers from Europe of the steerage class through the port of Philadelphia. I would recommend that you invariably, and without any exceptions, require the personal apparel and effects of each and every such person proceeding from Europe at any time, either in winter or summer, during the continuance of the existence of cholera in any portion of that continent, to be thoroughly disinfected by steam at a high temperature, irrespective of what declarations may be made to the domicile or sojourn of such persons, and irrespective of what enlargement or limitation may be put by the Treasury Department upon the term "immigrant."

All of which is respectfully submitted.

E. O. SHAKESPEARE,
Port Physician.

The BOARD OF HEALTH.